WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP : ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT-

The aim of this paper is to examine women's possibilities to advance to leadership positions. This paper is based on the fact that there are less female leaders than male leaders.. The aim is to find the influential factors behind women's career and ways to increase the number of women in leadership positions. It was found that traditional gender roles, organizational culture and women's perceptions and competences all have a role in women's managerial career development. Organizations were seen to have the most power, as they make the direct decision on promoting female leadership by recruiting and offering career advancements

KEY WORDS: Female Leadership, Career Development, Leadership Position. Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION-

The importance of this research based on the idea that attitudes toward women in leadership affect women's participation in leadership, and in turn, women in positions of leadership engage in policies that positively affects women. This reciprocal effect furthers the process of gender equality in the work force, and promotes an environment where women are supported to move into autonomous and independent activities. This process gradually leads to further acceptance of women in business or political leadership. The main aim of this study is to dig out major factors that have been affecting women to participate in leadership and decision making roles. Accordingly, this research has been conducted to investigate and answer the following main research questions:

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- What are the status of women in leadership?

- What are the major barriers that hinder women to have access in leadership

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY-

The overall objective of the study is to investigate the status of women"s participation in leadership and decision making . To ascertain impediments hindering women's managers' advancement to leadership positions

- To examine the extent to which the challenges impinge on female managers' performances and their progresses to leadership position

- To suggest possible strategies that can be used to enhance women's participation in leadership position

CHALLENGES BEFORE WOMEN LEADERS-

1.Men versus Women Issues: Men and women are always two sides of the same coin. Each one of them has their unique charisma and each one thinks and handles situation differently. While a man may be practical woman could think farfetched. But it is still a shame that irrespective of being equally talented there is always discrimination in the eyes of the beholder. In corporate environments, where people of both gender participate in all activities with equal enthusiasm such vague differentiation is the biggest challenge for a woman. One must understand that a working woman loves your concern but not your sympathy. She wishes to be recognized with her talent and not her gender.

2. Gender Bias: Gender bias is another challenge that many women experience at their work place. Though we can say that corporate offices are bridging the gender gap slowly, private institutions and government offices are still way far behind. Jobs that require frequent travel, physical exertion etc. are still open for men only as they are considered more eligible than women. Many companies while hiring women employees ask them openly about their marriage and further family planning as they cannot afford the maternity leaves and other flexibility perks.

3. Organizational culture-Employers and female professionals agree that family responsibilities and a lack of flexibility in the workplaceare obstacles to women's advancement. Such a culture can create many barriers for women seeking senior management positions.

4. Sexual harassment- Sexual harassment has been identified as one of the most pervasive and serious problem of women as managers.Bierema and Opengart (2002) are of the same opinion with Burton (1991) that some of the factors, which contribute to the slower career progress of women and fewer opportunities are because of stereotypes against women as leaders.

5. **Negative Attitudes For Women-** This is owing to traditional approaches and models of careers in organizations which were based on the experience of men, thus negative attitudes for women who seek career advancement in the workplaces. Another example is that in 2003 while working in a voluntary job for a particular organization in Lesotho, the researcher's female supervisor was denied promotion in spite of her outstanding work performance as her boss claimed that she had just lost a husband and had six children as well as other family responsibilities, hence, she would not be able to balance the two (her job and family commitments). There is a significant relationship between organizational culture and women'smanagers' progression to leadership position. Underinvestment in social capital Ryan and Jetten (2009) were of the opinion that women's'

6. **Personal demographic**s -like age, level of education, marital status, number of children, personal income and number of jobs currently had where you work for pay and Work situation characteristics like job tenure, size of employing organization, hours worked per week.

7. Lack of Family Support- Lack of proper family support is another issue that working women suffers from. At times, the family doesn't support women to leave the household work and go to office. They also resist for women working till late in office which also hampers the performance of the women

SUGGESTIONS

1. **. Education** -There is need to educate women**.** Education is the bedrock of any nation building and if women who constitute more than half of our population lack it, it would have serious effect on nation building. Basically, women need to know how to read and write. They should know their constitutional rights and duties. A good educational qualification will enable them take up issues and improve their chances of being put forward for leadership positions.

2.The drive for diversity- must be led from the top. The board chair, chief executive and senior executive team should be trained on equality and diversity issues and develop clear governance and accountability mechanisms to deal with gender equality across the organisation. The

leadership should regularly articulate and demonstrate personal commitment to equality and diversity. A committee comprised of senior leaders should meet regularly to set and review strategy, action plans and progress. Leaders and managers should take personal responsibility for delivering on equality and diversity targets and objectives and these should be included in their individual performance assessment reviews. This approach should be cascaded down through management levels in the organisation

3: **Gender Equality Principles** There must be a comprehensive strategy in place to integrate diversity into operations across all regions and levels. There should be a clear framework of gender equality principles signed off by the board, senior executives and managers in the organisation. Diversity should be stated as a core value in corporate values and business strategies. The strategy should encompass action plans that have clear objectives, measurable targets, timeframes and accountability mechanisms. There should be key performance monitoring indicators.

4.: **Representation of Women** The board should specifically address the representation of women in its senior executive team and establish a time-bound plan for redressing imbalances. It should consider first steps such as adding 'one' to senior executive and management teams; offering 'shadow' roles to emerging women leaders where there is not an immediate opportunity to add to the team; and fast-tracking high-potential candidates by giving them the right job experience and profile. It should plan for succession by ensuring it is nurturing a strong supply of qualified and talented women throughout the company to act as a sustainable pipeline to senior leadership. It should make certain that effort is sustained to avoid slowdown.

5. **Reporting-** should be transparent and include monitoring on the basis of sex-disaggregated data, as well as collection of qualitative information from women.This should cover all levels and opportunities, including monitoring of appointments, promotions and allocation to important projects and opportunities, to ensure that women are not losing out on opportunities downstream that limit their chances for success in applying for executive roles.

 6. **An effective enabling framework-** should be provided through operational policies and adjusting and remodelling workplace practices. Robust anti-discrimination measures should be in place and be applied. Recruitment, promotion and development processes should be continually evaluated and adjusted. Working practices should be critically reviewed and approaches evolved that are more conducive to retaining and assisting women in their career progression .

7. **Incentives** should be provided for aspiration, practical support and development opportunities for female executives, including potential new female executives, and learning for male executives. There should be in-house networks along with encouragement and time for women to join external women's executive and business networks. Both gender-balanced and women-only leadership development programmes should be offered. There should be opportunities for both young and more senior women executives to be noticed through appearing on conference panels, being part of government or business delegations and being spokespersons on the media. A combination of mentoring opportunities should be set up, where women are mentored by key men and by successful women, and men are 'reverse' mentored by women to improve collaboration and approaches to improving organisational culture, tackling unconscious bias and removing barriers in traditional workplace practices. 5.3 Change multipliers and public policy environment

8:Initiative for Change- Equality/women's ministries and/or equality and human rights commissions should initiate champions for change. They should encourage prominent male business figures to set up leadership networks with the aim of promoting women's leadership within their own organisations and through influencing and mobilising senior male colleagues. Male champions should work to break down barriers, disrupt the status quo, make business culture more inclusive and challenge leadership forums where women are invisible.

9: Networks should collaborate in leveraging support. Networks should work smartly together, sharing lessons, partnering on initiatives, prompting public opportunities to make women leaders visible and seeking to multiply their impact by drawing in likeminded organisations. The ministry for women (or equivalent) should bring together a cross-sectoral strategic advisory group of women and men.

10.**Others-** Government must ensure that the right enabling environment is in place. This includes legislation protecting paid maternity/paternity/parental leave and outlawing discriminatory employment practices and sexual harassment. Government should exercise rigorous oversight to ensure that gender equality is practised at all levels of the education system from early years to higher education and careers advice. Attention should be paid to building the self confidence and self-belief of young women and developing a portfolio of skills and competencies.

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